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Scottish Chief Justice of Jamaica (18th Century) and his Court Reports

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The Edinburgh Legal History Blog

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Posted on 17/11/2010 by [John Cairns](#)

The Blog has a strong interest in slavery, particularly in individuals held as enslaved in Scotland in the eighteenth century. Many Scots went to Jamaica and acquired land; others went as professionals and craftsmen. The Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh owned slaves and a plantation there. Burns the poet nearly went to Jamaica as a book-keeper, only the success of the Kilmarnock edition making it unnecessary. A number of enslaved black men from Jamaica came to Scotland, taken there by their masters and mistresses.

John Grant, from Invernesshire, son of Patrick Grant of Glenlochry, was successful in Jamaica, acquiring land there, and becoming an assistant judge and then Chief Justice of Jamaica (1783-1790). He returned to Scotland, buying the contiguous estates of Kilgraston and Pitcaithly in Strathearn. Dying on 28 March 1793 (in Edinburgh, where he is buried), he had no issue, and his estates in Jamaica and Scotland were inherited by his brother Francis. John's wife, Margaret daughter of Roderick Macleod, W.S., died in 1825. His nephew Sir Francis Grant was a fashionable Victorian painter. A portrait of John Grant by Lemuel Francis Abbot was sold by Christies, London, in 2000: http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=1820671

Grant prepared a set of reports covering part of his time on the Jamaican bench. These were posthumously published in Edinburgh in 1794. One of the very few surviving copies is in Harvard University Library (ESTC N479290). This has now been digitised and is available online: <http://hollis.harvard.edu/?itemid=|library/m/aleph|004417047>

Browsing through this throws light on Grant's fellow Scots in the island. It is a wonderful resource. There is a preliminary analysis by Mindie Lazarus-Black, "John Grant's Jamaica: Notes Towards a Reassessment of Courts in the Slave Era," *Journal of Caribbean History*, 27 (1993), pp. 144-159

See further the Harvard Law School Library Blog: http://etseq.law.harvard.edu/index.php/site/852_rare_18th_century_jamaican_reporter_digitized/

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